

Article

## No Future without Humanities: Literary Perspectives

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**Abstract:** What might Humanities have to offer to the current big societal and technological challenges? The nine short position papers presented here were collected by Svend Erik Larsen from colleagues and members of the Academia Europaea Section for Literary and Theatrical Studies who have been actively involved in the changes within their discipline in the areas they introduce. They show emerging interdisciplinary fields, provide new insights, indicate significant cultural achievements and forge new collaborations in order to shape the outlines of the research landscape of the 21st century. Their main concern is not the future *of* Humanities, but the future *with* Humanities.

**Keywords:** future with humanities; human rights; transnationalism; translation studies; cultural literacy; emotions; memory studies; the posthuman; digital humanities; creative teaching

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## 1. Introduction

Economic pressures as daily stress are felt in many research institutions across Europe today, not least in the Humanities. No wonder, then, that researchers across the many disciplines in this field, whatever their institutional shape and affiliation, are asking one immediately relevant question: What is the future of Humanities? With its defensive undertone one may, however, also ask if this is the most relevant question today. The nine exemplary position papers I have collected here from colleagues in literary studies are triggered by another and more daring interest than the survival of Humanities as we know it. The main concern is not the future *of* Humanities, but the future *with* Humanities.

When modern Humanities emerged in the 18th century around a recognition of the historicity of reality, of the natural world and human life world alike, the pre-Enlightenment disciplines closest to modern Humanities, philosophy as the most prominent among them, were redefined and all the historical disciplines concerning literature, art, language, culture *etc.* took shape and step by step acquired an institutionalized position in education and research. What has been gradually forgotten in many disciplines since their beginnings is that the burning problems to be dealt with are located on the margins of the disciplines, the point where interdisciplinary challenges emerge. These changing circumstances create pressure to rethink the disciplines as a whole, to move established boundaries and maybe even to turn a discipline into something entirely different. The historicity that allowed modern Humanities to come into being also gave Humanities the task of redefining itself in response to the historically developed challenges of the human life world as well as within the theoretical and analytical insights produced by the various disciplinary practices themselves.

The core of Humanities can be said to be the changing forms, means and conditions for human interaction with the surrounding world, whether natural or social. In contrast to many disciplines in sciences we are used to call hard sciences, a precondition for the Humanities is always to include the human component in this interaction and consistently to ask the basic research questions from this perspective, also highly complex questions concerned with motivations, intentions, consciousness *etc.* Language is no less a natural phenomenon than dark matter and an equally enigmatic and relevant research object, but it cannot be studied without taking human subjectivity into account. Questions concerned with dark matter could not be studied by any astronomer without language and subjectivity behind the ideas and interpretations that allow him or her to ask basic questions and to elaborate answers. A neurologist may ask questions about neural processes without including human subjectivity, but the value of the results will ultimately depend on the potential of the research, whether inside or outside brain research, to do so with precision. The progress of medicine will never serve the peoples of the world without a profound knowledge of those cultures where people have to be convinced about what the role of modern medicine might be. Experience from the fight against HIV in Africa shows the problem.

In the future, the role of Humanities and human knowledge in any research domain and the interpretation and use of its results for humans, will depend on the capacity of all sciences to open their disciplines to an interdisciplinarity that cannot be imagined only from within the disciplines themselves (regardless of whether we choose to label this as inter-, multi- or cross-disciplinarity). Therefore, the draw up new research fields on the map of sciences cannot be gathered in one fixed group based on one argumentative structure. Also not the examples presented in this collective paper. But they

underline the importance of this very activity where the limits of a discipline is challenged and also that possibility of meeting that challenge can be exemplified as roads to follow.

The brief position papers in this section are made by literary scholars who have been actively involved in the changes within their discipline in the areas they introduce here. With literary studies as the point of departure, the position papers intend to indicate some openings for a future with Humanities by turning, modestly but insistently, their different fields of study toward larger, unknown fields which will not leave Humanities unchanged and which will also challenge both the Humanities and other sciences with invitations to forge new collaborations in order to shape the outlines of the research landscape of the 21st century.

## 2. Translation Studies

Translation as a literary practice has existed for millennia, but the systematic study of translation as an academic subject is recent. The term “translation studies” was coined in the early 1970s by the American translator/theorist resident in the Netherlands, James Holmes [1]. A series of meetings in the 1970s of scholars from Israel, the Netherlands, Belgium, Slovakia (then part of Czechoslovakia) and others led to the formulation of research in what came to be known as Descriptive Translation Studies, or polysystems theory (see [2]). In 1980 Susan Bassnett’s book *Translation Studies* [3] provided an overview of the emergent field which could be used by students wanting to engage with some of the key theoretical issues such as definitions of equivalence, loss and gain in translation, and untranslatability; the book also discussed specific problems of literary translation and provided an overview of the history of translations in Europe. By the mid-1980s, the term “translation studies” had passed into general use and the names of scholars such as Bassnett and Andre Lefevere [4,5], Jose Lambert [6,7] Lawrence Venuti [8,9] and Gideon Toury [10] were becoming more widely known.

In the early years, there was a clear distinction between programs offering translator training, often linked to interpreting studies, and the newly coined translation studies. Today, those distinctions have become blurred, and the term “translation studies” may cover translator training, and foreign language study, as well as programs deriving from literary studies and linguistics but covering larger cultural sign systems in various media. What is clear is that there is global interest in the study of the many aspects of translation and that this interest has increased greatly as a result of the global political and economic changes in the early 1990s. The break-up of the Soviet Union, the end of apartheid in South Africa, and China opening up to the West have all had epistemological consequences that can be clearly seen in the increased interest in studying translation right across the world. Since the 1990s the number of monographs, conferences, degree programs at all levels and journals has increased beyond anything the first proponents of Translation Studies in the 1970s could ever have imagined. Important specialist journals today include *Babel*, *Forum*, *Meta*, *Perspectives*, *TTR*, *Target*, *Translation Studies*, *Translation*, *The Translator*, to name but a few.

Also significant in the 1990s was the conceptualization of translation as necessarily involving much more than linguistic transfer. The “cultural turn” in translation studies, proposed by Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere, was very influential in that it stressed the importance of taking a more holistic approach to translation, and examining the dual contexts in which both the source text and the translation (also called the target text) are created.

With the growth of the field, whole new areas of research have been opened up: the study of translation norms and the relationship of translations to prevailing aesthetic criteria at specific moments in time, the abandoning of the tyranny of an alleged original text, the status of translators and translations and the role played by translations in national literary histories, gender issues in translation, the significance of translation in postcolonial contexts, changing concepts of ethics of translation, self-translation, which includes when a writer produces work in more than one language, pseudo-translation when a writer claims that a text is a translation when it is not, the translation of political discourse and consequent ideological implications, news translation, including global news translation, both written and televised, audiovisual translation, sub-titling and sur-titling, translation and censorship, intersemiotic translation, and intertemporal translation, this panoply of topics indicates just some of the fields that are being developed by translation studies scholars around the world [11].

Parallel to the growth of Translation Studies, within literary studies the metaphorical use of the terminology of translation to discuss global migration, intercultural exchange and in particular postcoloniality has led to the coining of the term “cultural translation” (not to be confused with the cultural turn in various disciplines within the Humanities). Research into self-translation, translation and travel writing, world literature and translation are three areas where these two different approaches, the one based on the study of translations and the other using translation as a metaphor have started to come together in productive ways. With the growing importance of Translation Studies the study of literature has moved beyond its traditional borders and generated increased research into areas such as translation and psychology, eye-tracking and brain development, translation and multilingualism outside the Arts and Social Studies.

### 3. Cultural Literacy

What has happened to literary studies? What do literary researchers actually do now, and why should anyone else be interested in their work? What might literary scholars have to offer to the “questions of the day”—globalization, cultural globalization, cultural difference, technological advances, changes in the life of the body? And how has the research produced by these scholars leapt ahead of their (or other people’s) conception of them as a changed discipline group within the humanities?

This change has not happened overnight, but has recently gathered speed. In the early twentieth century, critics such as F. R. Leavis, René Wellek and Erich Auerbach took the long view of literature, replacing a stress on the specifics of authors, histories and *œuvres* with a more systematic understanding of how one reads. Such thinkers were defining and thus safeguarding the autonomy of literary studies as a discipline; in this sense they were continuing a line from the ancients. From the 1960s, however, with the rise and adoption of French critical theory, literary studies grew away from the tradition of “pure” philology and textual criticism and began to borrow from other fields, such as anthropology, linguistics, philosophy and psychoanalysis, to think about its objects and practices. In the next few decades, it became further politicized, reading texts through the lenses of feminism, queer studies, postcolonial studies and so on, and thus came, in turn, to direct a literary gaze onto other objects.

In 2000, Franco Moretti argued for abandoning close reading, the staple of literary studies, in favor of a “distant reading [which would] focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems” ([12], p. 57). The text will not and should not

disappear; but what is more pertinent to the kind of research the “people formerly known as literary scholars” are doing now is the concept of *textuality*—a way of interrogating and investigating non-textual cultural or social objects in a literary way.

A group of European researchers have been working together since 2007 to develop this project of rethinking literary studies in the context of current interdisciplinary research. The key risks of any interdisciplinarity research—which we surely all do now, whether in groups or singly—is that it either loses its distinctiveness by hovering in “the space-between” or that one of the discipline fields (generally the Humanities one) ends up, wife-like, migrant-like, changing its name or adopting the language, style or gestures of the more powerful discipline with which it consorts. The field of “literary-and-cultural studies” (acronym: LCS) is multilingual and multidisciplinary, but it retains its specificity, its origins and its language. It explores how the exchange of knowledge can be genuinely reciprocal; for example, not just turning bioethics on Marcel Proust but turning Proust on bioethics...

“Textuality” is one of the four concepts that drive LCS, characterizing both the way in which objects can be perceived and identified and the method by which they are to be read. The question of reading, already foregrounded in the “age of suspicion” [13] of the latter twentieth century, has turned into a new kind of cultural literacy in the era of “liquid modernity” [14]. The other three concepts are “fictionality”, “rhetoricity” and “historicity”. If any cultural object or process can be understood as an artifact, it is formed *textually*—shaped, woven or built. Like other virtual forms, *fictionality* may be rule-bound in the sense that it presupposes rules of artifice, but it is not bounded by natural laws: a fiction is not a lie, but its truth-claims are not testable. Assuming language (or similar structures) to have probable purposes and undoubted effects is *rhetoricity*. And all human artifacts and practices have *historicity*—extended in time and conditioned by time, whether or not they have extension in space, their freight of past is essential to their meaning.

The “Cultural Literacy” project has brought together hundreds of researchers, from Europe and beyond, in workshops, conferences and publications, focusing on four key areas of LCS—cultural memory, migration and translation, digital textuality, and biopolitics and the body. Its current plans are to develop a European Forum, combining academics and policymakers in a debate on the role of LCS in research and higher education in the twenty-first century [15,16].

#### 4. Digital Humanities

Digital Humanities is an emerging interdisciplinary field in the Humanities, maybe best seen as a direction towards a goal that has not been reached yet. The digitalization of virtually every cultural object, the domination of the digital in the production of all new artifacts, and the constant use of digital media by large groups of society, including humanities scholars, make the position of Digital Humanities strong. In applications for funding many research projects seek to integrate some kind of Digital Humanities component, and the intricate mechanisms of pushes and pulls are moving funding towards such projects. At the same time, there is some frustration among scholars at not having arrived yet at a point where Digital Humanities lives up to its many promises for providing new insights and forward-looking ways of working.

The house of Digital Humanities is large and includes now almost mundane approaches to sharing information and publishing, as well as large infrastructure projects where texts and images are

digitalized and made available to researchers as well as the public, even though copyrights still prohibits otherwise simple functions such as making a corpora of 20th century texts available at libraries for further analysis with digital tools. Yet, in retrospect, this building of digital archives will, along with the Internet in general undoubtedly be considered as one of the most significant cultural achievements in recent years.

On the pedagogical side, there are many tools that students (and researchers) can learn to use in the same way that searching for books in a library catalogue is a tool one needs to master. New databases are made available and the abilities to search for words and frequencies in large corpora are just a few of the ways in which formerly vague and intuitive ideas of patterns in the fabric of culture can be examined more closely, not least when studying the historicity of concepts.

On the research side, there is a distinct challenge in making two ends meet: the complex web of skills and knowledge that is expected of a scholar of art, literature, history, *etc.*, and the more technical and less proven approaches of a Digital Humanities scholar. Ideally, there will be individuals who possess both sides of what is necessary to make a solid Digital Humanities contribution to a discipline, but unfortunately that is rarely the case yet. Still, advances will most often come from the well-conceived cooperation between traditional scholars and scholars with computing expertise.

In the near future, the most interesting and challenging part of Digital Humanities is how it relates to research and education in different disciplines, and how and whether new approaches are able to change disciplines. For many researchers this challenge triggers the important question: are digital humanities projects changing the fundamental research questions that are being asked, or are such projects and approaches essentially “just” providing more solid empirical evidence for the answers to age-old questions? It is obviously important not to let the limitations of the machines determine the questions. And, conversely, to be clear about the limits of machines and, for example, to know how the interpretation of even a short text is a daunting challenge for the integration of computers in research.

An exemplary scholar working between a traditional humanities discipline and digital approaches is Franco Moretti. Most scholars will agree that his work is both well-founded in the tradition of literary history and driven by an attempt to push the limits of insight by taking on new investigations. He also works both collectively in the Stanford Literary Lab and as a more traditional individual scholar. What makes his work exemplary is the ability to contribute on different levels of textual complexity by focusing not only on the capacities of computers but on models that can produce insights beyond what a more or less intuitive reading of a corpus would yield [17]. He has written on structures of single texts using for example network theory on Greek plays; he has analyzed title structures in thousands of texts; and he has used even larger corpora in, for example, his work on the bourgeois novel [18]. Thereby he addresses three domains that all literary historians will have to address in one way or the other: (1) the establishment of readable corpora that can be read and analyzed; (2) their contextualization in relation to an overwhelming number of other texts, whereby one has to rely on others’ readings; (3) the integration of a general cultural context that has been constructed and historicized according to the principles of other disciplines.

By using models and digital tools, Moretti and many others [19,20] are able not just to rely on secondary sources but actually to perform contextualized analyses of a heap of material that could not have been accessed otherwise than by digitalized data collection, since no one has “world enough and time”. A strong awareness of the history of the discipline and of all the levels of knowledge that go

into scholarly work is still needed but, at its best, the productive encounter between research questions and new ways of finding patterns in texts and between texts by way of massive, digitalized data and their wider impact on culture is bound to improve the quality of research and education as new generations will be using such approaches on a daily basis—not as a revolution of the field that would destroy disciplines, but as an integration of methods that should begin right from the start of undergraduate studies.

## 5. Creative Teaching

As suggestively demonstrated by Jean-Marie Schaeffer, the crisis of literature and its use is defined less by the supposed decrease of its social impact and the accompanying decline of traditional literacy than by the crisis of the teaching of literature, which is no longer adjusted to the experiences of actual readers [21]. All reflections on new directions in literary scholarship and research as well as on the future funding of these programs should therefore take into account issues of teaching as well. As long as new research programs continue to focus exclusively on the exploration of new fields and questions, be it historically or theoretically, without paying attention to the development of new forms of interaction between research and teaching, literary departments will be confronted with the painful question of their own relevance. Not only funding institutions but also students will question the education proposed by these departments, which have difficulties in demonstrating that they are capable of making a real difference (see [22] for a sociological approach of the mismatch between what literary departments are offering and what their students are in fact expecting from them).

It has been thought for many decades that a possible answer to this question could be found in the shaping of creative writing programs, which are now entering the European curricula as well as those in the United States, although not to the same degree. For many reasons, however, creative writing programs are as much part of the problem as the alleged crisis they are trying to solve. True, it cannot be denied that creative writing has had a lasting effect on the way we read and write today [23]. However, 99% (at least) of the students to whom creative writing programs are catering will never have the opportunity to really use their knowledge and skills in any professional context. Moreover, creative writing reproduces also the extremely traditional view of the literary author as an individual artisan (some would add: genius) that no longer reflects the reality of contemporary literature.

Other radically different solutions have to be found if one wants to justify the investments made in literary research and teaching. Private and public sponsorship may of course offer a most needed help, certainly in the case of types of research and practice that are not commercially sustainable. As is persuasively argued by Kindley [24], however, this solution is not free from counter-productive side-effects: first, because even here the support for more experimental forms of reading and writing cannot transcend institutional constraints and, second, because this strategy tends to enhance the importance of certain types of literature at the expense of others (the literary essay is a safer pedagogical category than, say, experimental poetry or drama).

However, a different approach is possible. It may take its departure from the material and economic context that determines all forms of literature. On the one hand, every type of writing is inevitably strongly related to a certain medium [25], and this fact certainly provides us with many possibilities of a renewed take on the relationship between text and context(s). On the other hand, and taking into

account the fact that its basic economic principle of writing is the mechanical reproduction and commercial exploitation of unique works [26], literature is also a creative or cultural industry, which should also be taught in this perspective. Issues of digitalization are at the crossroads of both media dependence and economic constraints, but it would be an error to see them as the only platform for teaching creative writing.

Digitalization makes the dependence of literature on media much more clearly visible than previous, now almost naturalized forms of mediation, such as print. Digitalization emphasizes the industrial component of all aspects of reading, writing, and circulating of works, and underlines, retrospectively, the fact that book production and printing have always been a type of industrialized work. How do these insights influence the invention of new forms of teaching and studying literature? Mainly in two ways; first, with regard to the teaching of new skills and knowledge, focusing on both the medial aspects of writing (all students should acquire for instance more than a basic knowledge of online publishing, both theoretically and practically) and the economic aspects of literature (all students should be well aware of the way institutions help make and unmake literature); and second, with regard to hands-on training through internships in, for example, publishing houses, libraries, cultural institutions *etc.*, as well as through project-based work (no students should be allowed to obtain a degree without the minimal inclusion of such elements).

Such new initiatives require a new type of teacher, whose theoretical and critical knowledge of literature would be completed, enriched, nuanced by other competencies, preferably in the field of the creative industries, and by experience of cultural and literary project management. This is a shift that goes beyond the current buzzword of evaluation, which often maintains the divide between genuine scholarship and practical implementation. A new type of practical and creative teaching could produce a shift which, according to the convictions of the authors of *Digital Humanities* [27], implies a radical reframing of humanities scholarship. Here, the major goal is no longer to study the works of others but to produce and shape such works as an educational enterprise, a creative reinvention of the intellectual, social and cultural endeavors of the first passionate scholars of the Renaissance.

## 6. Memory Studies

The preoccupation with memory in relation to literature and the arts is as old as cultural history, most often seen in opposition to oblivion, and mnemotechnical devices have been developed to counteract the process of forgetting. In this context, the main focus was on the content of memory, its archival characteristics. In recent history, from around 1800, the focus instead moved to memory as a process unfolding in the present in which forgetting is integrated as a pre-condition for reworking the past. Memory not only requires a capacity to recall and retain the past and to transfer it to various durable media that could counterbalance the short lifespan time span of the human mind. First and foremost, it requires the mastery of the capacity to select what to remember and what to forget, the point being that complete recall equals complete oblivion.

As a corollary to this change of focus the center of attention moved from the past to be remembered to the present where the process of recollection unfolds, collectively and individually as a selective construction process, also addressing the important question of the relation between power and the use of memory. Memory is a transformative process, reshaping the past in the present to keep it alive as



embodied by the remembering subject responsible for the transformation. Trauma studies in various contexts have contributed significantly to the development of this take on memory studies. Hence, construction became a key word instead of archive, selection became essential instead of exhaustive remembrance, and dynamic remembering replaced the static memory as the corner stone of conceptualization and investigation. This perspective has been developed in the 19th century by writers, artists and thinkers—such as Baudelaire, Wordsworth, Bergson—who insisted on the link between memory and imagination, and thus the future orientation of memory, instead of memory and the past. Later, around 1900 and into the 20th century, this approach gained momentum and reached a new level of conceptualization with Sigmund Freud in his theory of repressed memories reworked in a dialogical process, and with Maurice Halbwachs coining the concept of collective memory, which again acquired a new dimension through trauma studies in relation to atrocities around the world, also beyond the holocaust [28].

In the last decades a new challenge is offered by the proliferation of media through which the act of remembering is channeled, performed and transmitted. Up till now this condition has been less explored although it changed the conception of what determines the memorial process. This development gave prominence to the relation between sensual experience, mediation and memory and therefore opened a broader view of how aesthetics, imagination and memory interact and opened new interdisciplinary venues for the memory studies. Language is no longer the only or, in all contexts, the most salient medium. Each medium or compounds of media engaged in the memorial process structures the relation of selection between remembering and forgetting in its particular way while at the same time allowing for various modalities of remembering as a continuously unfolding, debatable and malleable process, reshaping the past in the present. The age old question of the limits of human memory thus moves from the restricted mental capacities of humans or the availability of sources, to the ongoing interaction among humans and between humans and our experience of the surrounding world, including new trends in psychology and neuro-science as well.

Mediation is a key concept for the understanding of the new conditions and possibilities of memory. The media—linguistic, visual, digital, spatial, *etc.*—and the memorial process are interdependent: on the one hand, what can be remembered depends on the media; on the other, certain types of memorial processes favor and select the most appropriate media within today's large media landscape. However, many projects, studies and publications on memory in the last 20 years have only begun to explore the interdependence on multiple levels of texts, media and memory. Under the auspices of *Academia Europaea*, the project *Exploring Texts, Media and Memory* will follow this line of thought and do research on various texts, media and art forms; projects concentrated on detailed analytical engagement with selected texts and other media specific objects; investigations of larger units as genres, traditions, canonizations; analyses of the use or abuse of memorial products and processes in specific cultural contexts; explorations of spatial environments such as landscapes, monuments, architecture as media for memorial processes [29,30].

## 7. Emotions

Literary works deal with affective phenomena, such as emotions, feelings, sentiments, dispositions, moods and passions: who can forget Achilles' anger or Ulysses' curiosity, so wonderfully illustrated in

Dante's *Inferno* as an insatiable desire to know, or Othello's jealousy, or Lady Macbeth's remorse, or Romantic melancholy, or Prufrock's incertitude? Courage, ambition, vanity, love, sadness, compassion, pride, fear, joy, anger, *etc.* have always been represented directly or indirectly in poetry, drama, prose and film. Fictions of various types and in various media have always described the actions, thoughts and emotions of human beings in different times and cultures.

Paradoxically, in the last few decades, literary criticism influenced by structuralism, post-structuralism, Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis has neglected, or narrowed, the emotional component of literature and the arts, while the study of emotions has been important in several other fields of knowledge since the 1970 [31–39]. Many disciplines—from economics to political science, philosophy, psychology, history, law and the neurosciences—have taken the affective turn. Literary critics, theorists and historians should reconsider the role of emotions in literature, the arts and various media; research in this direction has started to flourish, sometimes through the contribution of humanities' projects in interdisciplinary centers and institutes (see the Center for Affective Sciences in Geneva and Center “Languages of Emotion” of Freie Universität in Berlin).

Passions and emotions have been considered dangerous or useful and valuable since Plato and Aristotle in Western ancient philosophy, but affective phenomena started to constitute an autonomous field of investigation at the end of the nineteenth century, with Charles Darwin and William James [40–42]. In the 1960s the psychologist Magda Arnold challenged the perspective of James and Carl Lange who believed that emotions are caused by our perception of our bodily changes (breathing, heart rate, temperature): she argued that physiological phenomena (arousals) are responses to emotions and stressed the importance of our evaluations (appraisals) of the events that trigger our affective response.

By reconstituting the reflection on emotions emerging from the works of some writers literary studies can interact with psychology and philosophy: several writers were true theorists and for-runners of contemporary theories of emotion: Stendhal, Hazlitt, Jane Austin, Robert Musil for example resisted the typical Romantic separation between reason and sentiment, showing that emotions are linked to values, intervene in inter-subjective relations, are motivated, and are often the object of analysis and justification.

The scrutiny of phenomena, such as empathy and sympathy, in literary and artistic disciplines offer rich examples of these emotions nurturing the debate on moral, political and aesthetic issues [43]. The investigation of the emotions represented, suggested, and provoked in readers and spectators by literature and the arts will resume the essential bond between literature and the emotions, reconsidering in a new light the old question of the relation between art and life [44]. The understanding of emotions in their link with values seems more and more urgent in a world in which communication is essential for political and existential reasons, different cultures and traditions intermingle sometimes in confused ways, and technology changes dramatically our way of living and relating one another.

In today's academic landscape fostering interdisciplinary research, the study of emotions will also allow the humanities to connect with disciplines in the social sciences and even in the so called hard sciences partially disputing the prejudice of the total division between experimental and reflexive investigation, or between description and interpretation.

Fictions are not mere fantasies; they are conjectures, thought experiments about possible situations in life, and use and stimulate imagination, which is essential in every aspect of existence. If the research in the affective sciences can inspire literary studies, these studies should contribute to deepen

the examples investigated and the questions raised by psychology and philosophy. Compared with philosophical accounts, literature offers sustained examples versus brief remarks. Appraisal of emotional episodes intervenes not only in the fictional character's mind but also in the narrator's, this blending being the sign of the complex inter-subjective dynamics of emotions, and of the continuous rapport between fiction and reality.

Compared with psychological accounts, literary disciplines can enlarge the scope of the definition of the emotions. Psychology and neurosciences are limited in their tests to a few basic emotions—most often fear and disgust: literature on the contrary describes many different emotions proving that their number is virtually infinite, and that subtle emotions are as important as the so called basic emotions (fear, anger, disgust, sadness, joy and surprise). Experimental psychology is limited, in the artificial setting of tests, to momentary, episodic appraisal, while novels, poems, drama and film offer retrospective or prospective appraisal: justification is crucial for the development of an emotion, for its medium and long term consequences in the future implying actions, character traits, beliefs, values, *etc.* Literature can be true “sentimental education” in both ethical and aesthetic terms.

## 8. Transnationalism

“Today transnationalism seems to be everywhere”, Steven Vertovec starts off his *Transnationalism* with, “at least in the social sciences” [45]. In fact, transnationalism has been there in literature ever since Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in 1827 declared the era of national literatures to be over and that of world literature to be at hand. Ironically, though, the next one-and-a-half centuries would precisely see the indomitable rise of national literatures, at least as far as the study of literature was concerned, with each nation—which in the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century almost exclusively meant European or by extension Western nations, with the possible exception of Japan—celebrating its own literature, in its own language, as a consecration of the nation built on the Romantic trilogy of people, language, and territory.

For many political units the national literature of its dominant entity served to project and promote a unity across otherwise disparate parts, as for instance in the British and French empires. In the meantime the study of literatures across the borders of nation-states and especially languages exclusively fell to the equally newly founded discipline, almost concurrently with those focusing on national literatures, of comparative literature. Increasingly, comparative literature came to study demonstrable links, by translation, imitation, reference, biographical evidence, *etc.* between two or more works in different languages. After World War II a more contextualized comparative cultural studies agenda gained the upper hand. Throughout, world literature remained a very minor, and at times almost ridiculed sub-discipline of comparative literature. In Europe the subject was not taught as such. In the United States it was rather looked down upon as a basic introductory course for undergraduates, acquainting them with at least some of their literary heritage, which for the longest time was seen as being almost exclusively European.

Things started to change in the late 1970s, with the advent of postcolonialism in the guise of Edward Said's *Orientalism* [46], followed by the early writings of Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha. Although largely concerned with Anglophone literatures, the very concept of the postcolonial implied crossing boundaries, even if only between former colonial metropolises and their former colonies. To

date, most of these discussions confine themselves to literatures written in one European language, but there certainly is room here for even more transnational approaches spanning literatures in various languages. What there is need of, then, is a truly comprehensive perspective taking in these various literatures in their various languages. This might be a suitable task for a retuned comparative literature operating also under the aegis of the new world literature studies I will end this position paper with.

The 1970s also saw the awareness of multiculturalism as an adequate notion for the understanding of transnational trends, first in Canada, then the United States and Australia, and subsequently also Europe. At the same time, a combination of multiculturalism and post-colonialism inspired Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* [47] focusing on the slave trade and the circulation of Africans as factors in the creation of modernity. Next to hemispheric and transatlantic there now also is a thriving industry of transpacific studies. The same period also saw a growing interest in studying European literatures no longer solely as separate national literatures, but as partaking of a common, shared or joint cultural space, albeit fluctuating in time and geographic scope. Finally, the 1990s also saw a return by comparative literature scholars to world literature.

This return was kicked off by a 1994 volume edited by Sarah Lawall, *Reading World Literature: Theory, History, Practice* [48], and spurred on by Pascale Casanova's *La République mondiale des lettres* and its later translation [49,50], Franco Moretti's *New Left Review* article "Conjectures on World Literature" [12] and its many successor-articles and reactions, and David Damrosch's *What is World Literature?* [51]. Many of the ideas aired in these publications met with staunch opposition, but the success of the new world literature is undeniable, and testified to by the multi-volume anthologies of world literature put out by Longman since 2004, under the general editorship of Damrosch [52], and the completely revised new versions of the Norton counterpart, with as general editor Martin Puchner [53]. In many ways this renewed interest in world literature, which now comprises not just as in its earlier guises the literatures of Europe and (primarily North) America but truly of all the world, forms the culmination of the transnational turn in literary studies.

Altogether the transnational developments sketched here underwrite the idea, and the ideal, expressed by Martha Nussbaum in her many books, but especially in *Cultivating Humanity* [54] and *Not for Profit. Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* [55] that the humanities in general, and the study of literature in particular, serve the development of a universal citizenship grounded, as advocated by Edward Said in his posthumous *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* [56], in a new humanism. As in Vertovec's social sciences, then, in literary studies too transnationalism is our best hope for the future, of our discipline, but also of humanity.

## 9. Human Rights

Human Rights form a set of interwoven political, ideological, economical and judicial ideas emerging in Europe in the late 18th century. They found their first formulations in the declarations underpinning the French and American revolutions and gained new momentum after WW2 with the creation of the UN and its charter on Human Rights, followed by the amendments which, among other things, also included specific rights for women and children. The basic, simple idea that humans are born equal across religions, ethnicities and cultures, simply by being human, was propelled by the process of secularization during the European Enlightenment, but with later and still ongoing

consequences and heated debates in global politics (e.g., democratic constitutions and institutions, abolition of slavery), in society (e.g., general education, the welfare state), in law (e.g., principles of restorative justice, abolition of torture and capital punishment, international courts).

The philosophical foundation of the Human Rights complex was formulated by 18th century philosophers such as David Hume, Adam Smith, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant, arguing that humans are not equal by an alleged divine origin, but by immanent rational and emotional capacities which, in principle, are universally shared by all humans and therefore enable them to engage in a shared universal understanding. Literature has played a major role in the development and dissemination of these foundational ideas by being the primary medium to imagine possible scenarios for the complex life worlds of human interaction based on universal human capacities, as well as the limits of such visions.

Hence, literature also shows the challenges, the conflicts and the shortcomings produced by Human Rights discourse in relation to the cultural practices it produces. First, it creates a universe of multiple contrasting voices and subjective positions. Second, literary discourse more than other discourse, explores the ambiguities and the infelicities of language and exploits its resources of irony, satire and paradox, thus presenting both the ideal discourse of Human Rights and its dead end when translated into human interaction. Third, literature explores the Human Rights discourse because it works with the same language and discourse that also constitute the basic articulations and self-criticisms of Human Rights. Today, more than ever, this multilayered complexity corresponds to the multicultural reality of conflicting value systems, legal systems and forms of a sense of justice that characterize a globalized world. By exploring the contrasting landscape of Human Rights in a global perspective, literature contributes to a new interdisciplinary agenda within and beyond the Humanities, in particular within the emerging world literature paradigm.

This contradictory complexity has characterized Human Rights from the very beginning, due to the fact that the universal harmony of the basic principles was disseminated worldwide by global colonization and reconciliatory ideas primarily rooted in Christianity and Westernized individualism. The limits of Human Rights principles—in local law, sense of justice, everyday ethics, religious practices—are not only defined from within, but also contested by the concrete history of their dissemination. Hence, the study of Human Rights is an essential gate to a more comprehensive study of the processes of globalization than isolated studies of economy, law, politics, history, *etc.*, but at the same time it invites isolated disciplines to a research collaboration with the Humanities as a core participant.

The research goals of this enterprise have a double perspective that transcends the goals of any single discipline. One goal is to study the historical developments of the practices and conflicts generated by Human Rights as a way of understanding the cultural complexity of multicultural human life worlds. The other goal is to imagine a human life world where new practices to cope with transgressions of Human Rights can emerge, an endeavor that requires profound reflections on our conceptions of humanity, collective values, equality and sense of justice.

If the first goal follows on from the complicated issue of colonization and decolonization shaping a multicultural global reality, the second has moved to the forefront following global awareness of iniquities beyond any human scale that has been growing since WW1 and WW2, with consequent war crimes and genocides, along with the formation of tribunals set up to deal with them. Such atrocities

are not new in history, but global awareness of them as crimes against humanity is a 20th century phenomenon, produced by a growing acceptance of Human Rights principles. However, and at the same time, such unspeakable horrors also expose the limits of our understanding of humanity and human behavior beyond existing legal, psychological, religious and ethical ramifications and also beyond the tools and strategies we exploit to cope with them in ways that may reestablish the trust in collective values and sense of justice, necessary for the continuation of collective human life worlds.

Local courts or international courts may issue a life sentence for the killing of 10,000 or 1,000,000 people, but the very scale makes the verdict meaningless when translated into an everyday sense of justice. It requires the works of human explorative and experimental imagination to envision new ways of balancing retribution and reconciliation and new ideas of what is forgivable and unforgivable, of the limits of humanity, of the establishment of accepted collective values without denying the reoccurring reality of radical wrongdoing.

Like the study of the complicated practices engendered by Human Rights principles, this visionary goal also requires an interdisciplinary collaboration, placing the arts, taken in the broadest possible multicultural and transnational sense of the term, at center stage as the fundamental medium humans possess for imagining human potentials beyond the existing life world without denying its historical reality. Human Rights studies open a vista of an interdisciplinary collaboration where no single discipline *a priori* has the right questions and answers, but where Humanities plays an important role [57–59].

## 10. The Posthuman

The idea of the posthuman has emerged rather recently as a term that summons up various ideas (and realities) of a possible, radical change in human existence that would lead to a new mode of being (e.g., Hayles, Fukuyama: [60,61]). Advances in biotechnology have made the possibility for humanity to interfere and direct its own evolution as a species into much more a question of ethical restraints than an adventurous topic for science fiction. The integration of humans and machines, cyborgfication, is also taking place with intentions of providing therapy to individuals and improve their lives, but the same technologies could also provide enhancements of people not otherwise in need of treatment. The number of challenges is immense and new ones arrive almost on a daily basis (e.g., Rose; Lippert-Rasmussen *et al.*; Savulescu and Bostrom [62–64]).

Even without technology the subject of the posthuman could have played a much larger role than it has. Following Charles Darwin, the continued evolution and speciation of the human race might have been given more attention as one of the most fascinating and troubling questions for humanity, considering that our religions and value systems are built on the premise of our own superiority and the implicit idea that something beyond the human would be unthinkable. And if not unthinkable, then so far away following eons of natural selection that it would not matter, no matter what visionary writers, artists and philosophers could imagine.

This is no longer the situation, and if not for anything else, the humanities should welcome a debate on what it means to be human where the stakes are much higher than usual, but which takes on core questions of human values in face of scenarios that are frightening to most. Losing the unity of humanity is for many seen as one of the most troubling consequences that could emerge from the use

of new technologies, paradoxically in an age where human rights are accepted without any divine underpinning but as a result of humanity's own maturation.

Moreover, the posthuman designates a field that is truly interdisciplinary across the natural sciences, medicine, social sciences, theology, philosophy and the arts, each with their strengths and weaknesses in addressing core questions of the existence of humans as bodily, conscious, social beings. None of these dimensions can or should be ignored when trying to understand the possible consequences of changes in the human condition ([65], p. 10).

The materials studied in humanities include fictions and artistic presentations, not least in the field of the study of human futures. Often this reliance on cultural artifacts and fictitious accounts of possible realities give the humanities a sense of being a step further away from reality than the natural and social sciences. However, in the case of the posthuman, literary fictions and artistic visions have a significant presence in contemporary culture, and takes part in shaping the collective attitudes towards different futures. Novels such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, films like Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, the artistic practices of Stelarc and Orlan, or the ubiquitous fascination with superheroes in a variety of media, are just part of a material where trans- and posthuman visions and values are set in scene.

Posthuman aesthetics is an emerging field of research where questions of aesthetics and ethics meet. Often discussions of the use of technologies take form as a meeting between philosophy and medicine, but this ignores how big a role aesthetics play in human existence and how it guides desires and choices ranging from personal, bodily changes to visions of life narratives. It is exactly here that humanities can ask new questions and answer them in a different way. For example by analyzing the relationship between beauty and imperfection, which may seem paradoxical until placed in a context of developments of taste and of the idea of the interesting. Or, in an age where much focus is put on the visual, narrative time is often forgotten and even more so, how there can be no stories without something that is unexpected and imperfect? And when ideas of radically longer human lives, or even infinite lives, are conjured up by futurists, they should be countered by asking if one can imagine what life like that would be like? Or when thinking of a posthuman, one should ask how the rest of humanity will fare? Will it cease to exist or will all of humanity gradually become posthuman? Within the humanities, we should at least not shy away for providing the best possible contribution to this discussion.

## 11. Conclusions

When modern Humanities emerged in the 18th century around a recognition of the historicity of reality, of the natural world and human life world alike, the pre-Enlightenment disciplines closest to modern Humanities, philosophy as the most prominent among them, were redefined and all the historical disciplines concerning literature, art, language, culture *etc.* took shape and step by step acquired an institutionalized position in education and research. What has been gradually forgotten in many disciplines since their beginnings is that the burning problems to be dealt with are located on the margins of the disciplines, the point where interdisciplinary challenges emerge. These changing circumstances create pressure to rethink the disciplines as a whole, to move established boundaries and maybe even to turn a discipline into something entirely different. The historicity that allowed modern Humanities to come into being also gave Humanities the task of redefining itself in response to the

historically developed challenges of the human life world as well as within the theoretical and analytical insights produced by the various disciplinary practices themselves.

### Author Contributions

Svend Erik Larsen wrote the “Introduction”, Section 6 “Memory Studies”, Section 9 “Human Rights” and Section 11 “Conclusions”; he was responsible for collating and co-editing the contributions. Susan Bassnett authored Section 2 “Translation Studies”; Naomi Segal authored Section 3 “Cultural Literacy” and revised Sections 4–6; Mads Rosendahl Thomsen wrote Section 4 “Digital Humanities” and Section 10 “The Posthuman”; Jan Baetens is the author of Section 5 “Creative Teaching”; Patrizia Lombardo wrote Section 7 “Emotions”; Theo D’haen authored Section 8 “Transnationalism”.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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